

Intergovernmental Cooperation Vision

The County, municipalities and schools have developed and maintained a way to communicate about all sorts of issues, particularly those that generate controversy. We keep collaboration and cooperation as a part of our everyday communication. The County has taken the lead to establish a dialogue with all St. Croix municipalities to discuss cost sharing and tax base sharing arrangements, to decrease the level of duplication of services, and to increase the number of shared community facilities especially among towns and cities. In addition, the County has worked with all St. Croix municipalities to make sure policies are consistent. When issues that concern the entire county need to be addressed such as utilities (siting) or wildlife corridors, the County works at cross-jurisdictional cooperation.

Introduction

Advances in technology and improved mobility have resulted in the faster and easier movement of people, money, goods, and other resources across jurisdictions. Many issues (e.g., schools, natural resources) cross intergovernmental boundaries, and the decisions, plans, and policies of one community can impact neighboring jurisdictions. There are many instances when entities abut and overlap with a variety of other entities. The environmental, economic, and social health of a community, surrounding areas, and the County are interconnected.

Through intergovernmental cooperation, communities can anticipate conflicts in plans and policies in order to identify potential solutions to mitigate such conflicts. Governmental units may also work together to capture opportunities for cost-sharing, competitive bidding, and the leveraging of available resources to everyone's benefit. Cooperation is key to strengthening the County economy while conserving tax dollars, providing services, and preserving resources. Examples of some activities include extraterritorial zoning and plat review, boundary agreements, and cooperative partnerships.

Getting all communities in the County to understand the benefits of working together for both the benefit of the specific community and the County is challenging. A common goal of working together and strengthening the County is needed to move towards prosperity and sustainability.

Intergovernmental cooperation is a difficult task. If it was not difficult, there would be more cooperation and coordination occurring. Perhaps the most important attribute of a County where successful intergovernmental cooperation exists is trust. Trust-based relationships play a key role in developing cooperative and innovative services to meet the needs of county citizens. Benefits of intergovernmental cooperation include:

- **Cost Savings:** Cooperation can save money by increasing efficiency and avoiding unnecessary duplication. Cooperation can enable some communities to provide their residents with services that would otherwise be too costly.
- **Address Regional Issues:** By communicating and coordinating their actions, and working with regional and state jurisdictions, local communities are able to address and resolve issues which are regional in nature.
- **Early Identification of Issues:** Cooperation enables jurisdictions to identify and resolve potential conflicts at an early stage, before affected interests have established rigid positions, before the political stakes have been raised, and before issues have become conflicts or crisis.

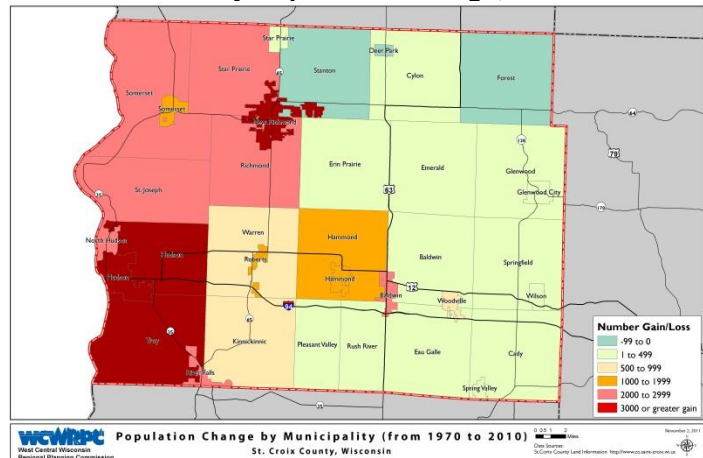
- **Reduced Litigation:** Communities that cooperate are able to resolve issues before they become mired in litigation. Reducing the possibility of costly litigation can save a community money, as well as the disappointment and frustration of unwanted outcomes.
- **Consistency:** Cooperation can lead to consistency of the goals, objectives, plans, policies, and actions of neighboring communities and other jurisdictions.
- **Predictability:** Jurisdictions that cooperate provide greater predictability to residents, developers, businesses, and others. Lack of predictability can result in lost time, money, and opportunity.
- **Understanding:** As jurisdictions communicate and collaborate on issues of mutual interest, they become more aware of one another's needs and priorities. They can better anticipate problems and work to avoid them.
- **Trust:** Cooperation can lead to positive experiences and results that build trust between jurisdictions.
- **History of Success:** When jurisdictions cooperate successfully in one area, the success creates positive feelings and an expectation that other intergovernmental issues can be resolved as well.
- **Service to Citizens:** The biggest beneficiaries of intergovernmental cooperation are citizens for whom government was created in the first place. They may not understand, or even care about, the intricacies of a particular intergovernmental issue, but all St. Croix County residents can appreciate the benefits, such as cost savings, provisions of needed services, a healthy environment and a strong economy.

Conditions, Trends & Issue Prioritization

Conditions & Trends

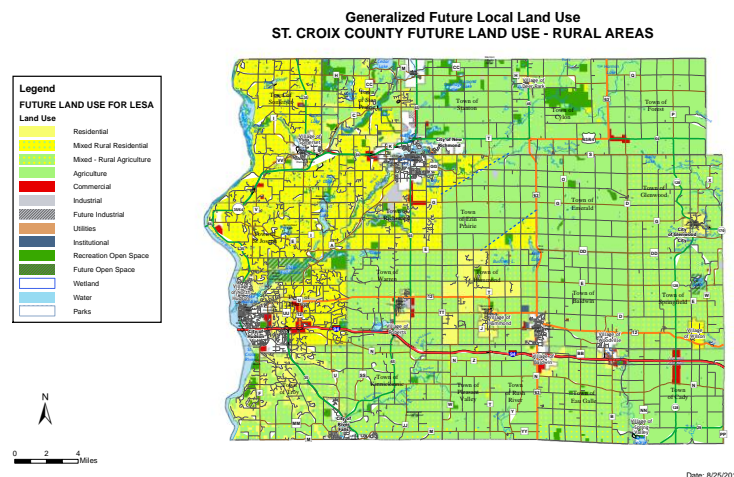
- Most of St. Croix County's population growth has occurred in the West side of the County.
- St. Croix County administers general zoning for 18 of 21 towns.
- St. Croix County administers shoreland, floodplain, sanitary, land division, and other ordinances.
- 31 of 35 municipalities have comprehensive plans.
- Many plans and ordinances overlap in jurisdiction and contain conflicting policies and regulations.

St. Croix County Population Change, 1970-2010



Source: West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

Generalized Future Land Use



Top Issues

- Uneven growth in the County has created challenges when developing county wide land use policies.
- Coordinated planning and minimized conflict among adjacent communities.
- Coordinated provision of services and cost sharing among adjacent communities.
- Town loss of tax base and land area due to annexation.
- School districts will be challenged to maintain educational standards in the face of declining budgets.

Implications

- Communities should use coordination and joint planning to promote land-use compatibility, conserve resources, and establish infrastructure linkages and systems. It is important to streamline procedures and review processes with greater emphasis on consistency between communities.
- Intergovernmental cooperation will increase as State, County, and local budgets become more restrictive and partnerships are pursued.
- Communities in the County can resolve conflicts through mediation, binding arbitration, non-binding arbitration, early neutral evaluation, focus group, mini-trial, moderated settlement conference, or summary jury-trial.

Special Subsections

Growth Trends and Planning Activities in Adjacent Communities

A County comprehensive plan is vastly different than a local comprehensive plan, specifically because there are so many more stakeholders in the process, as every community in the County presents numerous potential stakeholders. At the same time, there are countless trends and planning activities in the numerous adjacent communities impacting the County. These trends and activities from the various communities and counties greatly impact individual communities, and the County. Growth trends for communities in the County are relatively similar to the communities in the west central region. The Twin Cities metropolitan area, with dozens of units of government and a population of over three million, is the exception. The stakeholders in the County play a very small role in what happens in the Twin Cities. However, growth and policies in the Twin Cities greatly impact a large part of the County.

Intergovernmental Plans, Agreements, & Relationships

The number of existing intergovernmental plans, agreements, and relationships in St. Croix County is extensive. Each community in the County has some sort of plan, agreement, or relationship with an adjacent or overlapping government entity. In rural areas, the primary intergovernmental agreements involving towns are for emergency services and road maintenance agreements.

The cities and villages often have a greater variety of plans, agreements, and relationships than the County. Often, these are with adjacent towns. A common example is a city/village having a cooperative boundary agreement with an adjacent town.

All of the school districts are mapped in the community facilities section of the plan. Often, there is little local government involvement in school district facilities planning and operations. This is because each school district operates independent of the communities it serves. With future financial constraints and the growing trend in partnerships, it is easy to predict that more relationships may occur between school districts and other entities with local governments and the County.

There are a large number of county plans and ordinances. Listings of these are located in the *St. Croix County Intergovernmental Cooperation Element Vol. 2*.

Goals & Objectives

Goal 1: *Maintain mutually beneficial relationships with local government entities, neighboring counties, State and Federal agencies, school districts and other quasi-governmental agencies serving county residents.*

Objectives:

- 1.1 Coordinate development, resource protection, and planning activities within the County.
- 1.2 Anticipate and identify potential intergovernmental conflicts and work with involved governmental units to seek ways to minimize or resolve such conflicts.
- 1.3 Participate in intergovernmental discussions and maintain communication with adjacent and overlapping jurisdictions including school districts and emergency services on planning, development, and service-related issues.

Goal 2: *Improve communication and consensus among area municipalities regarding future development.*

Objectives:

- 2.1 Coordinate county planning efforts with cities, villages, towns and adjacent counties to maximize commonalities in goals, objectives and long-term land use plans.
- 2.2 Assist area municipalities as needed to jointly plan boundary areas and coordinate their long-term growth plans with the County Comprehensive Plan.
- 2.3 Improve countywide understanding of zoning, subdivision and other land use regulations and the development review process to increase levels of certainty among county and municipal governments, developers and land owners.

Goal 3: *Coordinate the use of public services and facilities to provide cost-effective service delivery to county residents.*

Objectives:

- 3.1 Identify and explore opportunities for coordination and cost-sharing of services and facilities or other cooperative efforts with other governmental entities

Policies

Communication

- 1.1 Use electronic communication and networks as a means of sharing and discussing information. Explore beneficial ways to link relevant web content.
- 1.2 Share reports, plans, plan amendments and ordinances and information on upcoming projects. Create a central location/inventory for posting plans, programs, documents, and information.

St. Croix County Comprehensive Planning Public Opinion Survey Report Results, 2008:

- When asked if they were satisfied with the working relationship between their County and their local government, most people said they were unsure (56 percent); 30 percent said yes and 15 percent said no.

- 1.3 Engage area school districts in educational programs to encourage participation in government, planning and land use issues. Share county resources such as parks and other facilities with school districts when feasible and beneficial.
- 1.4 Encourage joint advisory commissions in areas where development pressure is high and intergovernmental issues are complex. Use joint meetings to foster intergovernmental cooperation and address growth issues at both staff and decision-maker levels.
- 1.5 Pursue alternative dispute and conflict resolution to avoid litigation.

Multi-Jurisdictional Planning

- 2.1 Coordinate comprehensive planning between the County, municipalities, school districts, etc.
- 2.2 Encourage a consistent County and regional perspective on growth and development that will promote and enable the development and redevelopment of lands with existing infrastructure and services, where practical, or that will encourage efficient development patterns that are both contiguous to existing development and at densities which have relatively low municipal, state government, and utility costs.
- 2.3 Coordinate to conserve sensitive areas, resources, and working lands, including watersheds, environmental/wildlife corridors and park systems, stormwater drainage, wellheads/groundwater, and surface waters.
- 2.4 Identify, develop, and coordinate regional transit and linked trail systems through county/regional multi-modal transportation planning.
- 2.5 Encourage consistency in standards, regulations, and review procedures (zoning, subdivision, building, development and design standards, including in extraterritorial areas).
- 2.6 Coordinate and streamline decision-making and review processes when possible, including exploring joint plan commissions. Improve timing of land management decisions where concurrent review occurs.
- 2.7 Federal, state, and county agencies managing land should coordinate those activities with local governments.
- 2.8 Cooperate in emergency management and security.
- 2.9 Cooperate in waste reduction, reuse, and recycling such as Clean Sweep, composting, and e-waste and pharmaceutical collections.

Planning at the Urban Fringe

- 3.1 Explore interim development patterns to allow for eventual compact development with services, establish mutually agreeable edges and edge character, and coordinate attractive gateways to incorporated areas.
- 3.2 Use sub-area and urban transition area plans, cooperative boundary plans, and related agreements to reduce the uncertainty associated with development along community borders.
- 3.3 Encourage proactive conflict resolution.
- 3.4 Define required services for annexations and explore staged annexation coordination to prevent leap-frog development, irregular boundaries, and service delivery problems.
- 3.5 Coordinate official mapping, especially within Extraterritorial Plat Review areas.

Shared Services, Facilities, Equipment, and Purchasing

- 4.1 Work cooperatively to identify opportunities to reduce service costs and enter into agreements which are mutually beneficial.
- 4.2 Collaborate on development of public buildings when shared use is possible.
- 4.3 Explore opportunities for shared use facilities with school districts, technical colleges, and universities, considering siting needs for new facilities, including municipal representation for decisions regarding schools.
- 4.4 Maintain shared service and mutual aid agreements, and formalize them as needed.
- 4.5 Explore revenue sharing opportunities.
- 4.7 Explore ways to ensure adequate emergency services, including police services in rural areas, and continue and expand police, fire, and ambulance service cooperation.
- 4.8 Explore opportunities to expand state purchasing contracts to include more items, supplies, and equipment used by local governments.
- 4.9 Explore regional and joint municipal opportunities for wastewater treatment collaboration.
- 4.10 Cooperate in the dispensing of excess, surplus, or used property.